

# Recidivism reconsidered...

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Instead of Measuring Failure,  
Why Not Measure Post-  
Release Success?

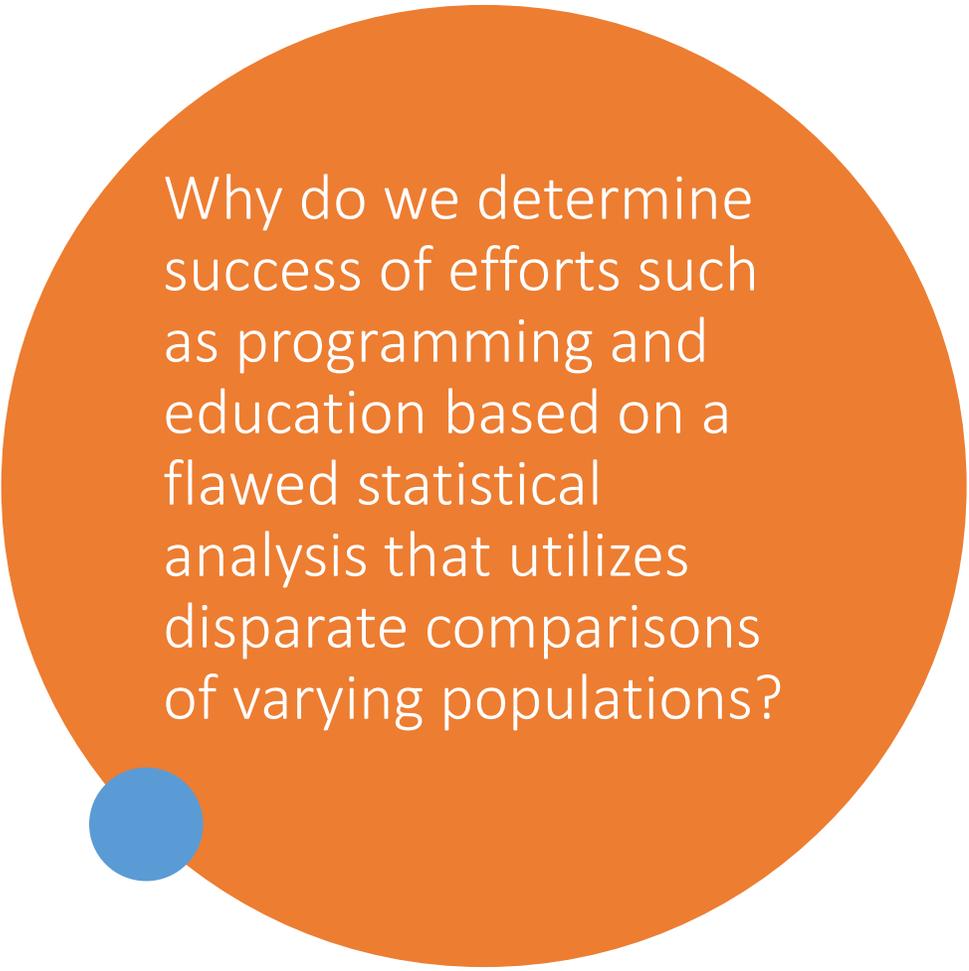


Drawing  
from recent  
literature

National Academies of Sciences,  
Engineering, and Medicine.  
2022. *The Limits of Recidivism:  
Measuring Success After Prison.*  
Washington, DC: The National  
Academies Press.

# Excerpts from the Report

- Recidivism is embedded in longstanding correctional philosophy and practice. The definition of recidivism in its current state is an inadequate measurement of success after release from prison as it focuses only on arrest/conviction/ reincarceration.
- What if we took a new approach? Let's look at the mentally ill population or those who struggle with substance use? What does success look like for them. Each reentry experience is complex and multi-factored.
- Given that complexity, evaluating the successful reentry of individuals released from prison is a challenging process.
- The report recommends the development of new measures of post-release success that take into account a number of factors in people's lives after incarceration, including personal well-being, education, employment, housing, family and social supports, health, civic and community engagement, and legal involvement.
- Let's explore this some more...



Why do we determine success of efforts such as programming and education based on a flawed statistical analysis that utilizes disparate comparisons of varying populations?



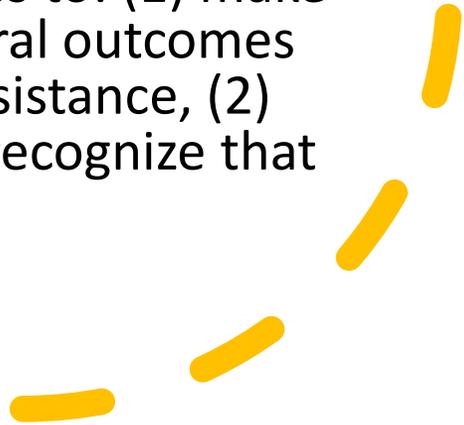
People who study criminal behavior report that leaving a criminal lifestyle is a gradual process which may take several years years, depending on aspects of a person's life —health, housing, supports, family, etc.

This process of ending criminal activity is referred to as “desistance.”

Like recovery from addiction, illness or disease, desistance can involve relapses.

Kazemian, L. (2021). Pathways to desistance from crime among juveniles and adults: Applications to criminal justice policy and practice (NCJ 301503). In Desistance from Crime: 32 Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice (pp. 163-213). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, NCJ 301497.

Pathways to  
desistance from  
crime among  
juveniles and  
adults:  
Applications to  
criminal justice  
policy and  
practice

- The primary difference between recidivism-focused and desistance-promoting approaches is that the first mostly focuses on a negative outcome (i.e., crime at a discrete point in time), whereas the second looks to measure positive outcomes that may result in reduced involvement in offending over time, ultimately leading to the stopping of criminal behavior.
  - Because progress and positive change are rarely acknowledged, many people involved in the criminal justice system find minimal incentive to try to make progress toward desistance.
  - Therefore, a change in thought and narrative needs to occur to move recidivism-based thinking to desistance. This potentially would involve a willingness to: (1) make assessments that extend beyond behavioral outcomes and include other known correlates of desistance, (2) track progress as well as failures, and (3) recognize that setbacks are part of the process.
  - Those take effort...
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## Additional Research and Reports...

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Best, D. (2019a). A Model for Resettlement Based on the Principles of Desistance and Recovery. Academic Insights 2019/03. Manchester, UK: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation.

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Best, D. (2019b). Pathways to Desistance and Recovery: The Role of the Social Contagion of Hope. Bristol: Policy Press.

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Leamy, M., Bird, V., Le Boutillier, C., Williams, J., and Slade, M. (2011). A conceptual framework for personal recovery in mental health: Systematic review and narrative synthesis. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 199(6), 445–452.

# Relations of Recovery Processes and Recidivism

- Leamy et al. (2011) developed the acronym CHIME to summarize the key elements of successful recovery services and interventions, comprising of the following:
  - Connectedness (social support and relationships),
  - Hope (positive thinking and motivation to change),
  - Identity (building a positive sense of self),
  - Meaning (developing a meaningful life and social roles/goals), and
  - Empowerment (personal responsibility, agency, self-esteem, and self-efficacy).

All these elements are highly relevant to the process of desistance from crime.



# Looking at barriers to improve outcomes

We should develop new ways to measure barriers to and facilitators of post-release success, which could help improve understanding of how to best serve those released from prison.

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Looking  
toward a  
new  
perspective



NOTE: Not advocating for abandonment of recidivism numbers as a measurement but advocating for the inclusion of positive outcomes that desistance from criminal activities and movement towards positive progress at reintegration.